

# Agenda Report

September 20, 2010

**TO:** Honorable Mayor and City Council  
**FROM:** City Attorney/ City Prosecutor  
**SUBJECT: UPDATE ON TRUANCY PROGRAM**

## RECOMMENDATION

This report is for information only.

### Background:

This school year begins the third year of the City's Truancy Program, a joint project with the Pasadena Unified School District aimed at reducing the incidents of absenteeism and tardiness at local schools. During the last year District and City staffs have dedicated a great amount of time and energy to keeping students in school. Because of the successful efforts last year the program has an expanded agenda for the coming school year.

During the 2009-2010 academic year prosecutors:

- Addressed a Student Attendance Review Board (SARB) training of faculty, staff and community members.
- Spoke to hundreds of parents and students at Muir, Pasadena and Rose City High schools and Jackson elementary school at nine Parent meetings to address truancy. The most successful meetings also included District and school administrative staff, health and mental health providers, social service agencies and members of the Safe Schools patrol of the Pasadena Police Department.
- Staffed bi-weekly SARB hearings (the final step before referral for prosecution) to lend our expertise and due process aspects to the proceedings and to encourage follow-up whenever possible.
- Attended community meetings that addressed truancy including the ongoing "Student dropout committee" of All Saints' "City Conversations" group.
- Sought out and investigated other jurisdictions where programs combating truancy are finding success to measure the feasibility of incorporating those ideas.
- Engaged in plans for a new approach to the "truancy sweeps" by PPD.

### **Changes to the Truancy Program:**

On April 29<sup>th</sup> Mayor Bogaard, Superintendent Diaz and District and City staff attended the California Mayors' Graduation Summit in Sacramento. The summit was a directive of the California Mayors' Education Roundtable to "bring together key staff to share data, evidence-based and promising practices and programmatic strategies to address local challenges affecting students' educational and career success."

From that experience, using the established City/PUSD District joint staff committee, members of this team undertook to revamp the occasional "truancy sweep," take a new approach to those teenagers who have "dropped out" in order to recover them into the school system and to use the influence of the Mayor's Office to engage the community in making school attendance a community effort.

### **"Sweep Intervention":**

In July community members from D'Veal Family Services, the Department of Children and Family Services, PUSD mental health, the Los Angeles District Attorney's office, the Student Welfare Attendance and Safety Director, Hillside, Foothill Family Services, Pasadena Police Department, Hathaway-Sycamores, Young and Healthy, administrators from the Human Services and Recreation Department and the office of the City Prosecutor met to rethink the manner and purpose of the occasional truant sweeps conducted by the Police Department.

What emerged from the interaction is a completely new way of conducting these early attempts at identifying and returning recalcitrant students to school. The sweeps will now occur once a month instead of three to four times per year. Additionally, while the previous iteration was purely punitive, the sweeps now will also be an opportunity for the community to meet with students who have opted out of class and their parents. The various public/private partners will assess each student for his or her level of absenteeism and for those who have become a chronic truant immediate intervention will be made.

Parents who retrieve their students will also be afforded opportunities for counseling, parent education or other family needs. The first of these sweeps will take place in the next few weeks; each will be "hosted" by a different high school with their assigned social service agency responsible for seeing that each contacted student has a follow-up to the assessment. The District will keep statistics from each sweep and the generic information about the schools attended and support systems required will be used to further revamp the program.

This is a truly collaborative exercise and an example of how eagerly the various departments and programs want to help address the drop-out problem. A flow chart of the proposed process at each sweep is attached to this report.

**Proposed “Recovery Center:”**

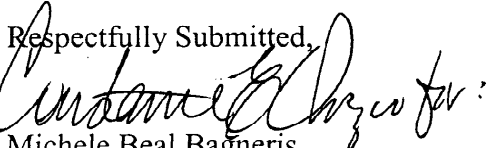
The “City Conversations Committee on Drop-outs,” an assemblage of community leaders concerned about the one in four students who do not complete their high school education, is investigating the establishment of a “Recovery Center.” This center would be a place for adolescents to go who have stopped attending school but are trying to return or attain a high school diploma. This community-driven effort is united in finding a solution to creating, supporting and defining the parameters of a single place to go to receive help. The location, funding source and the staffing of this center are still being explored but the purpose is clear: to find a way for each student to finish his or her high school experience. There are many obstacles: finding the students who have left, convincing them to return, ascertaining the appropriate path to graduation and providing ongoing support from both the District and the community. Yet the goal of reducing the rate of “one in four” is enough to keep working at the proposal. The participants are motivated to bringing the center to fruition and enlightening the community about the need to sustain it.

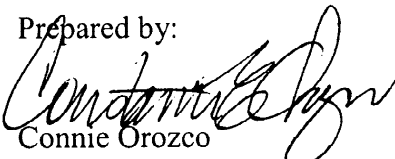
**The Mayor’s letter:**

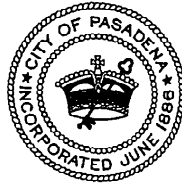
In past years, a letter was sent to all PUSD families at the beginning of the school year from the City Attorney/City Prosecutor advising parents of the consequences of truancy. In an effort to more effectively appeal to the students, this year’s letter was instead sent by the Mayor to each PUSD student as a heartfelt call to action for them to take school attendance on as their responsibility and be sure to attend on time if they are healthy. A copy of the letter is attached to this report.

As the year progresses the program will attempt to find sponsors to reward those students who have maintained a certain level of attendance; individual schools might also attach incentive to those students who improve their attendance over last year. Institutions are quick to identify those who don’t show up but not to reward those who do. It will be a goal of the Truancy program to rectify this omission.

As results of the new truancy sweeps and the progress of the “City Conversations Committee on Drop-outs” are determined, staff will apprise the Council of these developments in the weekly “Green sheets.”

Respectfully Submitted,  
  
Michele Beal Bagneris  
City Attorney/City Prosecutor

Prepared by:  
  
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Chief Prosecutor



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

August 16, 2010

Dear Students:

Welcome back to school! As Mayor of Pasadena, I am writing about a most important subject: *you!* You and your education are a priority for Pasadena. It is important that you attend school each day and be on time, because we need you to become the best prepared citizens that you can.

State law requires that every young person from age 6 to 18 attend school. While there are exceptions such as illness, they should be rare. Every class you attend is a step on a ladder of learning that will help you reach your full potential as adults. Skipping a class is like a missing rung, which often cannot be replaced, making your climb to graduation that much more difficult.

Pasadena is committed to helping to assure your safety, health and well-being during the school year by providing school policing, after-school activities, safe street crossings to school, library access, and more. As a student, you must commit to attending class, participating in work and discussion, reading, and doing your homework. To your parents, I urge you to make sure your child has the proper rest, nutrition and transportation to assure that they are at school on time and ready to learn.

Last year, 1 out of every 4 students in the Pasadena Unified School District didn't make it to their graduation from high school. This is unacceptable, and we want to do everything we can to reduce this terrible loss. Don't let the trend continue. Consistent class attendance must become a priority for you, not just for teachers and administrators. As President Obama said at this time last year: "*What you make of your education will decide nothing less than the future of this country.*"

Education is a community partnership, and the "drop-out rate" is a problem we can fix. We pledge today to do everything we can to educate our children. I hope you will join me today in joining that pledge and showing your commitment by attending class each day you are healthy. Best of luck in your studies!

Sincerely,

BILL BOGAARD  
Mayor